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Dublin Grand Opera Society

PRESENTS

THE PREMIER PRODUCTION IN IRELAND

OF

CLAUDE DEBUSSY'S

"Pelleas and Melisande"

(POEM BY MAETERLINCK)

IN

The Gaiety Theatre, Dublin

MAY, 1948



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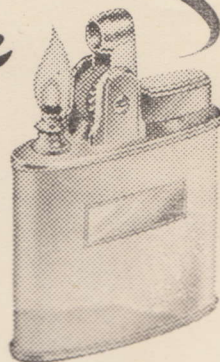
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# LEGATION DE FRANCE EN IRLANDE

Music is a universal language. It knows no frontiers. Neither time nor distance hinder it. Its kingdom is not entirely of this world for, speaking to the heart, it reveals what ordinary language cannot express.

No music endows with so much mystery this appeal to the springs of the subconscious as that of "Pelléas and Mélisande", and it is what places the work apart from the rest in the history of opera.

Many successive stages have passed since Monteverde and Alexandra Scarlatti attempted the association of the human voice and the symphonic orchestra as a means of expressing the passions which stir the human heart, rather than as a manifestation of religious sentiment, as had been the case with the **oratorio**.

Rameau brought to it his art and Beethoven his genius. With the inimitable grace of Mozart in "The Marriage of Figaro", the medium achieved perfection, while Gluck introduced into it a new tone of majesty. The Italian masters of the XIX century used easier methods, and the **bel canto** triumphed in Milan. It was then that Wagner, exploiting to the full all the resources of the symphonic orchestra, gave musical drama a new means of expression by the use and reiteration of melodic themes, each with its own value and deep significance. After "The Ring", "The Master Singers" and "Tristan and Isolde", it seemed that opera had reached its highest peak.

For several years it was felt that everything had already been said ; but human genius does not tire of creating. At the beginning of the century, a new formula was evolved by Claude Debussy. Deliberately forsaking the pompous Wagnerian architecture and the determinism of the melodic themes whose unavoidable reiteration evoked the phenomena of nature, the master of the new French school put into use a more subtle method of expression, nearer to that continuous yet always variable movement which belongs to the inner life.

Debussy adapted his own form of musical expression to the poetic form instituted by a young Belgian who is now famous, Maurice Maeterlinck. This was the association which gave birth to "Pelléas and Mélisande". At the time, the public's surprise was as great as that caused in their day by the first masters of the impressionist school of painting—Manet, Cézanne and Degas, with just as violent criticism and as passionate enthusiasm.

This is the work which will be performed to-night. I should say that I had never expected to hear it in Ireland, for it is an exceptional work, full of reserves and innuendoes, and rarely produced on the foreign stage. As with the canvasses of the impressionist painters, now universally admired, time had to do its work in order that music of so rare a quality might be appreciated.

On that account, French theatre directors show little enthusiasm for the "export" of Pelléas. They keep the opera of the man whom d'Annunzio called "Claude of France", as a secret treasure.

The "Dublin Grand Opera Society" has overcome their resistance. With endless patience, the Directors of this organisation have surmounted all obstacles. How can we fail to pay homage to them and the Members of the Special Committee who have won the sympathy and support of the French Government. Thanks to their efforts, the Paris opera has sent here its best artistes, and fortunately Monsieur Roger Désormière's services have been secured as conductor.

All the necessary conditions are, therefore, present for "Pelléas et Mélisande" to be played for the first time in Dublin, in all its beauty and amidst the tremor of those mysterious voices which speak to the soul.

OSTROROG.

*Page Nine.*





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**T**O-NIGHT, in presenting Debussy's great opera *Pelléas et Mélisande* for the first time in this country, the Dublin Grand Opera Society has made a notable contribution to our musical history. The occasion is indeed an historic one, for the eminent artistes taking part have come, with their conductor, direct to us from L'opéra Comique, Paris, where their names are famous for their interpretation of this beautiful French work of Art. The Conductor, Roger Desormières, whose name is so closely associated with "*Pelléas et Mélisande*" is an acknowledged authority on Debussy's music.

Whilst the Dublin Grand Opera Society feels justly proud and honoured to have sponsored such a momentous event, it is keenly sensible of the debt of gratitude it owes to the French Government and its Irish Minister, his Excellency Count Ostrorog, without whose generous co-operation the undertaking could never have been accomplished.

In the name of the Dublin Grand Opera Society I have honour and pleasure in extending to our French visitors a sincere Cead Míle Fáilte.

JOHN F. LARCHET,

President.



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## CLAUDE DEBUSSY

CLAUDE ACHILLE DEBUSSY, was born at St. Germain en Laye near Paris on the 22nd August 1862 and died in 1918.

This man who was to exercise a most powerful influence on modern music received a most conventional musical education attending classes in harmony and composition at The Paris Conservatoire. It was in a poetic rather than a purely musical atmosphere that Debussy absorbed the tendencies which were to make his work so markedly different. After travelling to Russia with Madame Von Mech, famous for her correspondence with Tchaikovsky, he returned to Paris winning in 1884 the "Prix de Rome" with his cantata "L'Enfant Prodigue."

Three years later came his meeting with Stephane Mallarmé and a group of French Symbolist Poets under whose spell he brought to his work that vagueness which has been its distinguishing characteristic.

The Composers first important instrumental work was the "String Quartet" performed in 1893. This was followed by the famous pastoral rhapsody "Prelude a L'Après—Midi d'un Faune" which created a sensation by its freedom of form and melody.

Debussy's chief orchestral works were "La Mer" (1903), "Iberia" (1906), "Images" (1909-10), and his only opera "Pelleas and Melisande".

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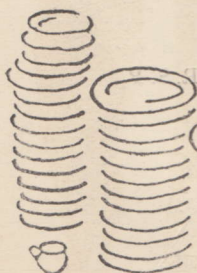
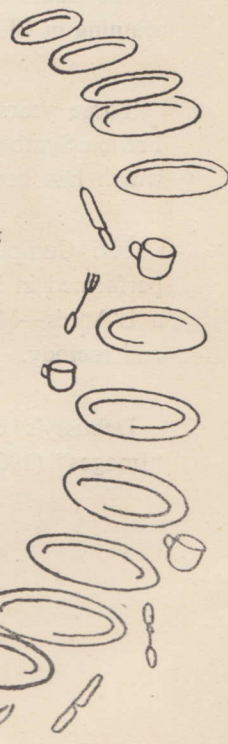
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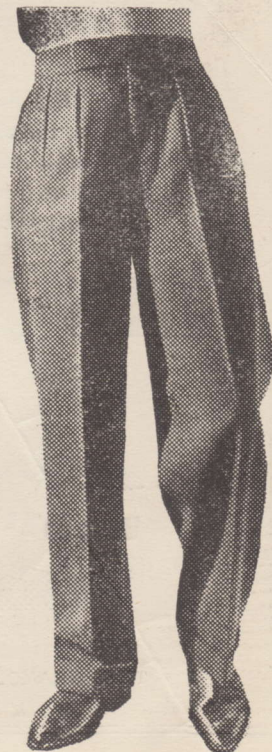


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*Page Fifteen.*



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AN OPERA IN FIVE ACTS

CLAUDE DEBUSSY

(Poem by MAETERLINCK)

## CAST

IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE

GOLAUD (Son of Arkel) ..... *Henri Ettcheverry*

MELISANDE ..... *Irene Joachim*

GENEVIEVE (Wife of Arkel) ..... *Marguerite Myrtal*

ARKEL (King of Allenmonde) ..... *J. Clavensy*

PELLEAS (Brother of Golaud) ..... *Jacques Jansen*

YNIOLD (Son of Golaud) ..... *Jacqueline Cellier*

PHYSICIAN ..... *Vere Laurie*

Conductor—ROGER DÉSORMIÈRE

Producer—VERE LAURIE

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## THE STORY OF THE OPERA

**D**EBUSSY'S "Pelleas & Melisande"—often called the French "Tristan" because both works portray lives driven to fate by forces stronger than themselves—represents the perfect marriage between composer and librettist. Claude Debussy could not have found better material for what he wanted to express in music than Maeterlinck's drama. He gave the latter's characters, if only for a short time, some semblance of life that they might not otherwise have had.

In this opera, Debussy's only venture in this field of musical composition, here are no arias just for the sake of an aria, the recitative follows speech with song and only then if the emotion of the character demands it. Now you may or may not like this opera but it cannot be denied that it is in its way a beautiful work of art.

### ACT I (3 scenes)

The opera opens in a dark and forboding forest through which Golaud stumbles, lost while hunting, suddenly the stillness is broken by the sobbing of a young griefstricken girl sitting by a well, who when questioned tells him her name is Melisande and that she comes from afar. Golaud sees a crown in the water and makes to retrieve it but is stopped by the girl who says she no longer wants it. He tells her he is Golaud, son of Arkel, King of Allemonde, and tenderly persuades her to accompany him to where he knows not, since he too is lost. The scene changes to Arkel's castle, in a room of which Golaud's mother, Genevieve, is reading to the near blind king, a letter from Golaud, to her younger son, Pelleas, telling him of his marriage to the Girl of the Forest and asking his brother to prepare Arkel for his homecoming. If all is well he is to set a light in the tower overlooking the sea. Pelleas enters and tells of a letter he had received from a dying friend who wishes to see him but Arkel reminds him of his own illness and persuades him to postpone his visit to his friend, also, since age has given him the wisdom to forgive Golaud, he is to light the lamp in the tower. Again the scene changes and we find Genevieve and Melisande talking in the garden. Melisande, newly arrived, remarks on the darkness of the garden and the surrounding forests but Genevieve is accustomed to the gloom having lived there for 40 years. They are found by Pelleas and together watch the ship, which has brought home Golaud and his girl-wife, leave the harbour below.



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THE STORY OF THE OPERA (*Contd.*)

ACT II (3 scenes)

Pelleas and Melisande are found by the "Blindman's Well" (so named because it was believed that its water could cure blindness but now since the King is nearly blind it is no longer used). Melisande tosses into the air a ring given her by Golaud but suddenly fails to catch it and it falls into the well. They search for it in vain. In reply to Melisande's question as to what they shall tell her husband Pelleas says he must be told the truth. Once again the scene changes and now we see Golaud,—lying injured on his bed attended by Melisande. His horse had taken fright and thrown him at the exact moment Melisande had dropped the ring into the well. He takes her hand to comfort her, for he sees she is not happy; the gloomy castle and surrounding sunless forests are oppressing her, and he discovers the ring is missing. Melisande confusedly stammers that it had slipped from her finger in a cave by the sea. Golaud insists that she find it and that Pelleas take her there if she is afraid to go alone. Melisande goes out weeping and finding Pelleas they go together to the cave although she knows it was not there she has lost the ring. Already the net closes inexorably around these fated children for while exploring the cave the moon shines out and shows them three white headed beggars sleeping on the cave's floor. Frightened they go out and hasten back to the castle.

ACT III (3 scenes)

In the opening scene Melisande is seen combing her hair in an open window overlooking a pathway along which comes Pelleas. He tells her he is departing on the morrow and asks for her hand that he might kiss it. She leans further out of the window and her hair flows over his face and in this moment the music swells in passion as Pelleas kisses her hair. Suddenly the rapturous spell is broken by foot-steps, it is Golaud, he laughs nervously and calls them both children, "children" he repeats as though he needed to convince himself. A change of scene shows us the vaults of the castle and Golaud, lantern in hand is shewing Pelleas a pool of stagnant water, he bids him stoop and look and not to be afraid. "Hold on to me" he says trembling "no not your hand, it might slip, your arm." Pelleas arises and looks fearfully at his brother. "Let us go from here," he says and together they come into the sunlight. At last Golaud unable to keep silent any longer speaks of his troubled mind and tortured heart, Pelleas and Melisande are not to be together again since she is with child and a shock might do her grievous harm.

Outside the castle under Melisande's window where the next scene takes us we find Golaud and Yniold, his son, by a former marriage, Golaud questions the boy about the behaviour of Pelleas and Melisande asking how often they are alone



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THE STORY OF THE OPERA (*Contd.*)

together, and, if they had ever kissed each other, to which Yniold replies "Yes, once while it rained." Golaud's fears are confirmed and he breaks forth in anguished shouts. He lifts the child to the now lighted window and demands if Pelleas is within. Yniold tells him he is and that "he just stands and looks at Melisande." Suddenly the boy screams, demanding to be put down and is led away by his father who is still without the knowledge which he desires yet fears.

ACT IV (2 scenes)

The curtain rises on a room in the Castle and Pelleas tells Melisande that his father's sickness has passed and he has been bidden by him to go on a long voyage but before he goes he must see Melisande once again so they arrange a meeting that night at the Blindman's Well. Arkel comes in, now that the shadow of death is gone he prays that "some joy and sun find entrance to our house." Golaud enters angry and brutal, he attacks his wife dragging her to and fro by the hair. Arkel makes to interfere but Golaud rushes from the room throwing Melisande to the floor where she lies shaken with sobs.

The next scene opens in the park, where Yniold watches some sheep driven in by the darkness. Now comes the Climax of the Opera. Pelleas and Melisande meet and declare their love for each other. In the distance they hear the doors of the Castle being closed and realize, too late, that they cannot return. They rejoice, but suddenly their ecstasy is shattered by the dark shape of Golaud who leaps on them from the bushes and with a blow of his sword kills his brother, but Melisande flees into the forest.

ACT V

Back in the Castle after her harrassing experience in the forest we find Melisande lying asleep. The old King and a Physician are standing nearby. She is dying, not from the slight wound caused by her husband nor because she has given birth to a daughter, but because she does not wish to live. Golaud enters and reproaches himself and when they are alone begs her forgiveness. He bends over her and asks if she loved Pelleas to which she replies that she did. Not satisfied Golaud persists "did she love him guiltily." Melisande makes to speak but her voice grows fainter and fainter. Arkel and the Doctor return and Golaud cries out that he shall never know if she loved Pelleas guiltily. They show her her baby but she is too weak to hold her. Melisande dies and Arkel looking down at her remarks her likeness to her own child whose turn it is now to suffer.

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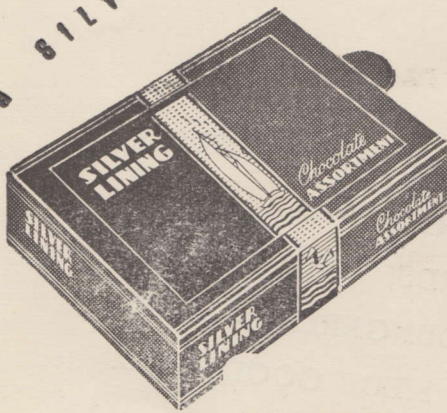
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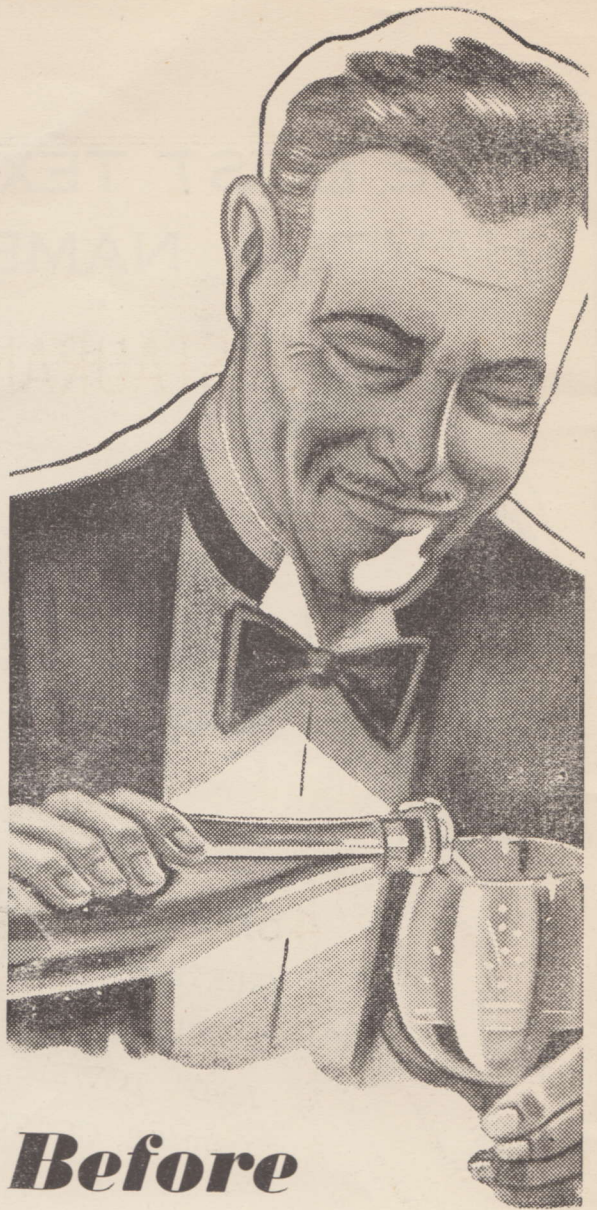


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## OUR STORY

THE DUBLIN GRAND OPERA SOCIETY saw the light of day following a meeting of a group of people interested in giving the music-loving Public of Dublin the class of productions it deserved, in February 1941. Looking back, a more foolhardy enterprise cannot be imagined seeing the World was then in the second year of history's greatest war but the founders courage and enthusiasm were not to be baulked by such an obstacle and the Society's progress since has more than justified their optimism.

Three months later having meanwhile received financial guarantees from a small group of supporters the first season of opera was presented in the "Gaiety"; the Management of that theatre having given generously of their help; a policy they have maintained to the Society down to this day. This first season provided the success necessary to spur our founders to continue their efforts with redoubled vigour and season has followed season with ever increasing triumph.

Not content with showing Dublin audiences its work, the Society has given loudly-applauded performances in Cork, Limerick and Belfast; tours which have given rise to a demand for return visits. We have now behind us the magnificent record of having produced some 25 operas in 13 two week seasons and thus we have built up a repertoire, unequalled even among the famous commercial opera companies, which includes not only the well-known and proven box-office works but such seldom seen operas as "Aida", "Samson and Delilah" and "The Flying Dutchman." We have brought to Dublin from season to season all the most famous English and Irish Artistes and we are proud to have given to opera in England, Artistes like James Johnston and Patricia Black who are now earning their laurels with the Sadlers Wells and Carl Rosa Companies. The years of war made many difficulties not the least of which was the costuming of the various operas. Here again hard work and enthusiasm made light of obstacles and the Society embarked on the acquisition of its own wardrobe with the result that to-day all or the greater part of the cast of each opera can be dressed without further cost and the Society has an asset worth many thousands of pounds.

No part of the Society's record could have been achieved without the selfless labour of a few people because no matter what ambition there is to succeed the effort of the many must be capably co-ordinated and in its Officers lies the Society's greatest assets. The President and Chairman since inception, Dr. J. F. Larchet and Commdt. W. O'Kelly respectively, have given untiringly of their skill and energy and ably assisted in their wise guidance by the Musical Director, Lt. Col. J. M. Doyle, have built the Society to its present pre-eminence in this City.

In recent years through the efforts of Mr. C. E. McConnell there was brought into being a "Patronage Scheme" whereby the Public can assist the Society in its efforts to produce the best of Grand Opera free of the haunting spectre of box-office failure.

The Society is happy to have succeeded in bringing "Pelleas and Melisande" with its Opera Comique Cast to Dublin and recognises that this has been made possible only by the efforts of the Committee producing this Souvenir of this historic occasion and our generous friends.

R. S. P.





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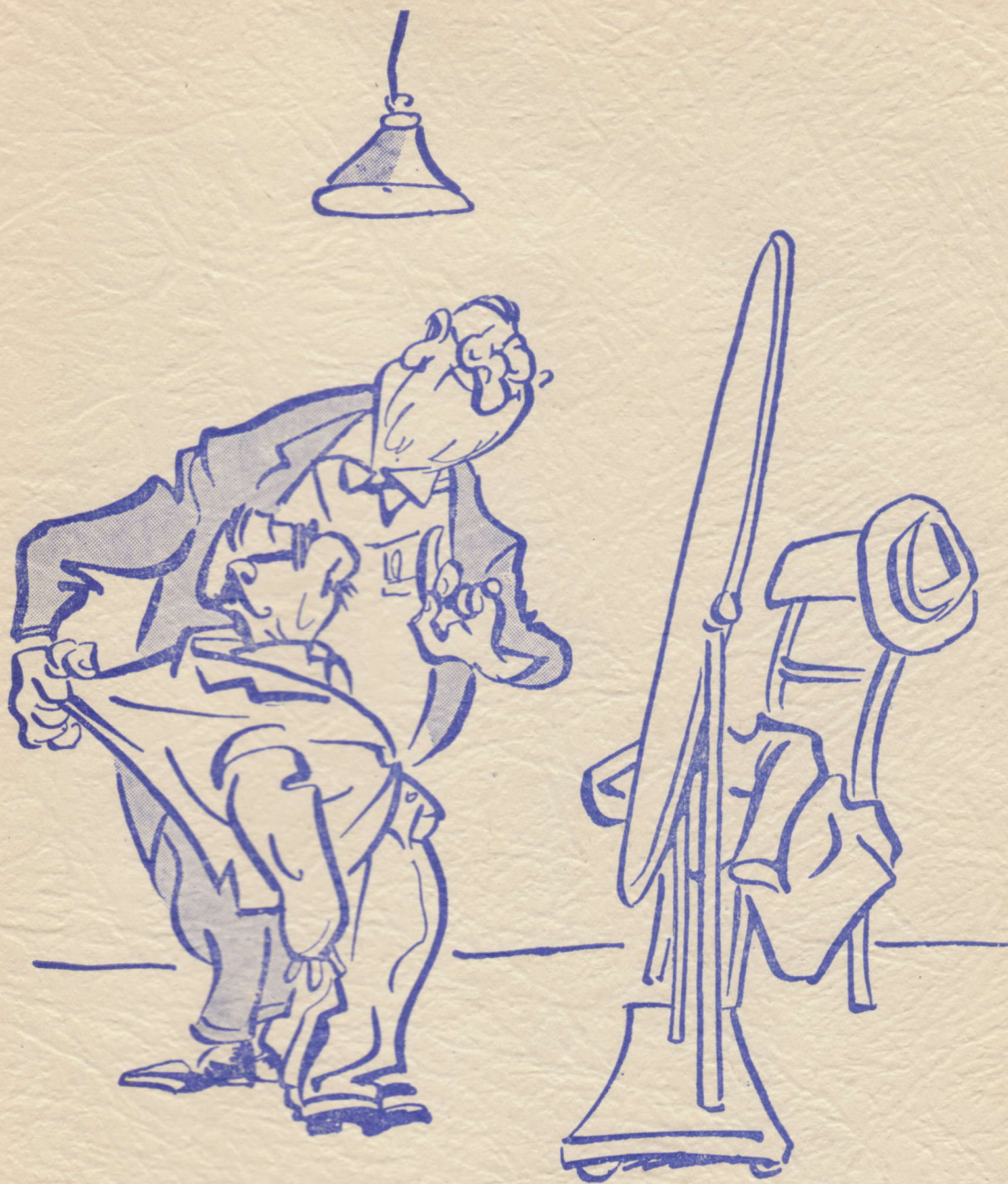
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